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BEYOND BELIEF: ON THE USES OF CREEDAL CONFESSION

Jerome Gellman

Aquinas took an “expressive view” of creedal confession: (1) Creedal confessions *express* a person’s faith, and (2) Other functions of creedal confession are dependent upon this expression of faith. I argue for a purpose of creedal confession that is not dependent upon the expressive function, but is non-expressive all the way down. This purpose depends upon people *not* meaning what they seem to be saying. To present my case I first clarify distinctions between: belief, acceptance, and treating as true, and distinguish different “scopes” of these epistemic attitudes: unrestricted, individual, and group.

Introduction

My interest here is with the institution of creedal confessions, public declarations of religious doctrines. Specifically, I am interested in taking issue with Aquinas, who recorded a rather common-sense view of the institution of creedal declaration, in what I will call the “expressive view.” In *Summa Theologica*, in a discussion of creedal confession, Aquinas quotes 2 Corinthians 4:13, “According as it is written, I believed, and therefore have I spoken; we also believe, and therefore speak.” He then comments on this verse as follows:

For the outward utterance is intended to signify the inward thought. Wherefore, just as the inward thought of matters of faith is properly an act of faith, so too is the outward confession of them.¹

For Aquinas, then, creedal affirmations are outwardly *expressive* of what exists inwardly: they *express* a person’s faith. For Aquinas, the inward faith alone “produces the act of confession without the help of any other virtue.”² People confess for the very purpose of expressing what they think.

Now Aquinas does see the institution of creedal confession as also having a non-expressive function, namely, not damaging the faith of other believers:

It is not necessary for salvation to confess one’s faith at all times and in all places, but in certain places and at certain times, when, namely, by omitting to do so, we would deprive God of due honor, or our neighbor of a service that we ought to render him: for instance, if a man on being asked about his faith, were to remain silent, so as to



make people believe either that he is without faith, or that the faith is false, or as to turn away others from the faith; for in such cases as these, confession of faith is necessary for salvation.³

Here, Aquinas points out the damage that can come from *failing* to declare the creed in contexts where so failing would weaken the faith of others. So creedal confession can contribute to sustaining faith. I imagine that Aquinas would also recognize the strengthening of faith as a purpose of creedal confession. For him, though, these non-expressive functions supervene upon confession's expressive function. Creedal confessions avoid damage to the faith and strengthen the faith by way of expressing outwardly what exists inwardly in the confessor. So the "expressive" view of creedal confession says that creedal confession expresses a confessor's faith and that other purposes of creedal confession depend upon the expressive function. For Aquinas, then, in the institution of confession people mean what they seem to be saying.

In contrast, I want to point out a function of creedal confession that does not go through the expressive function, but is non-expressive all the way down to the bottom. It is a function that depends upon people *not* meaning what they seem to be saying. I don't suggest just that this can happen or happens, such as when a doubter or heretic insincerely confesses. I mean to advance the idea that this is one of the very purposes of the institution of creedal confession, acknowledged or not.

*Belief, Acceptance, and Treating as True*⁴

My project requires that I begin with the notion of *belief* and two propositional attitudes beyond belief: *acceptance*, and *treating as true*. In what follows, I will be expanding these three categories into nine, resulting from three different "scopes" for each of the three categories. Philosophers including William Alston, L. Jonathan Cohen, Robert Stalnaker, Bas Van Fraassen, and Edna Ullman-Margalit and Avishai Margalit, have argued for a distinction between *belief* and *acceptance*, and some between these and *treating as true*.⁵ Alas, these philosophers differ over how they characterize the three terms *belief*, *acceptance*, and *treating as true*. For example, some take acceptance to be a species of belief, while others take these to be exclusive categories.

My first task here, therefore, will be to fix a terminology for these terms, before expanding them in the direction of differing scopes.⁶ My categories are not intended to reflect ordinary usage. Nonetheless, I do wish to capture some of the flavor of ordinary usage and thereby make the distinctions relevant to our ordinary understanding of belief, and to the nature of creedal confession.

Belief

Charles Saunders Pierce identified a "feeling of belief," a feeling of *conviction* that *p* is true.⁷ For someone to have a belief, however, it is not necessary that the belief-feeling be occurrent. It suffices that there be a *disposition* to have a belief-feeling in circumstances appropriate to expressing the feeling. William Alston has characterized this belief-feeling tendency as follows:

- (1) If S considers whether p is the case, S will tend to feel it to be the case that p.

Of course, the tendency, as well as the occurrent feeling of conviction, will come in degrees.

Pierce also wrote "Belief does not make us act at once, but puts us into such a condition that we shall behave in some certain way, when the occasion arises."⁸ So there are associated behavioral dispositions. Here is a list of the kinds of behavioral dispositions involved, based on Alston, with changes and additions of my own:⁹

- (2) If someone asks S whether p, S will have a tendency to respond in the affirmative.
- (3) S will tend to use p as a premise in theoretical and practical reasoning where this is appropriate.
- (4) S will tend to act in ways that would be appropriate if it were the case that p, given S's goals, aversions, and S's other propositional attitudes.¹⁰
- (5) S has a tendency, when acting in ways cited by (1)–(4), to act in a way that displays S's feeling that p.¹¹

The idea in (5) is that S, for example, not only will tend to affirm p if queried, as (1) says, but will tend to affirm p in a way that reflects S's feeling that p. The idea here is that behavior that reflects feeling will have a tendency to be different from behavior that does not.

Some philosophers, such as L. Jonathan Cohen, place these behavioral dispositions outside the concept of belief. I prefer, with most philosophers, to include the behavioral dispositions within the concept of belief, so I will say that S *believes* that p when (1)–(5) are true of S. Thus, belief is a dispositional complex of feeling and behavior.

Acceptance

As noted, various philosophers recognize a category beyond belief, that they call "acceptance." These philosophers use the term in widely differing ways, however. My purposes will be served best by adopting something close to Cohen's and Alston's positions. I will say that S *accepts* that p (implying that S does not believe that p) just in case (1)–(5) are true of S, with (1) replaced by:

- If S considers whether p is the case, S will tend to have a positive attitude toward the truth of p, but will not tend to *feel* that p is true.

And (5) replaced by

- S has a tendency, when acting in ways cited by (1)–(4), to act in a way that does not display a feeling that p.

Acceptance is like belief, then, except for lacking the dispositions to *feel* and to *express* the feeling that p is true. Here is an example of acceptance-formation: A philosopher has pondered arguments for and against the existence of God. The arguments in favor of God's existence impress her more than those against God's existence, but the former are not strong

enough to foster a belief-feeling disposition in her. She deems the arguments for God's existence to be strong enough, however, to *adopt* this conclusion as her philosophical position. So, she makes God's existence her position, adopting a positive attitude toward the truth of *p*, although not *believing* it, that is, without having a feeling of conviction that *p* is true.

It is generally accepted that belief cannot be formed by a simple voluntary decision, although philosophers might disagree over whether this is a contingent or conceptual fact.¹² On the other hand, philosophers take acceptance, characterized in various ways, to be voluntary, a matter of deciding to accept, as in the example I just gave of acceptance. Here we must be careful, though. We should distinguish between "acceptance" in the sense of an *act of deciding* to accept *p*, and "acceptance" as a *state* or *condition* described in the version of (1)–(5) for acceptance. Whereas deciding to accept *p* will be voluntary, the state of being in an acceptance-*condition* can come about in an involuntary way. For example, the evidence in favor of *p* might not be potent enough to cause me to believe that *p*, but strong enough to trigger the acceptance behavioral-complex with no decision on my part. When I say, then, that *acceptance* can be either voluntary or involuntary, I mean that one can get into the *state* or *condition* of acceptance either voluntarily or involuntarily.

Treating as True

At this point, I want to distinguish between *accepting p* and *treating p as true*. The difference is this. Accepting *p* clashes with thinking *p* is false or doubting *p*, or having no opinion, since accepting *p* entails having a positive attitude toward the truth of *p*. When I (merely) *treat p as true*, however, either I think *p* is false or doubt *p* or have no opinion in the matter. (In addition, treating as true might involve no more than a temporary conscious policy, rather than an implanted tendency. For the sake of simplicity, in what follows I will ignore this possibility and focus on tendencies to treat as true.)

Here, now, is a summary of my three categories:

(A) S believes that p:

- (1) If *S* considers whether *p* is the case, *S* will tend to feel it to be the case that *p*.
- (2) If someone asks *S* whether *p*, *S* will have a tendency to respond in the affirmative.
- (3) *S* will tend to use *p* as a premise in theoretical and practical reasoning where this is appropriate.
- (4) *S* will tend to act in ways that would be appropriate if it were the case that *p*, given *S*'s goals, aversions, and other propositional attitudes.
- (5) *S* has a tendency, when acting in ways cited by (1)–(4), to act in a way that displays *S*'s feeling that *p*.

(B) S accepts that p:

- (1) If S considers whether p is the case, S will tend to have a positive attitude toward the truth of p, but will not tend to *feel* that p is true.
- (2) If someone asks S whether p, S will have a tendency to respond in the affirmative.
- (3) S will tend to use p as a premise in theoretical and practical reasoning where this is appropriate.
- (4) S will tend to act in ways that would be appropriate if it were the case that p, given S's goals, aversions, and other propositional attitudes.
- (5) S has a tendency, when acting in ways cited by (1)–(4), to act in a way that does not display a feeling that p.

(C) *S treats p as true:*

- (1) If S considers whether p is the case, S will tend to lack a positive attitude toward the truth of p (that is, neither believes nor accepts p.)
- (2) If someone asks S whether p, S will have a tendency to respond in the affirmative.
- (3) S will tend to use p as a premise in theoretical and practical reasoning where this is appropriate.
- (4) S will tend to act in ways that would be appropriate if it were the case that p, given S's goals, aversions, and other propositional attitudes.
- (5) S has a tendency, when acting in ways cited by (1)–(4), to act in a way that does not display a feeling that p.

Treating as true typically occurs with what I shall call "restricted scope," existing only within certain kinds of contexts, and not in others. So, for example, a salesperson who treats as true the proposition: *the customer is always right* will do so in the restricted context of her job related activity.¹³ We suppose that she does not think the proposition true, but in job related contexts will have a tendency to respond positively when the proposition is queried (a customer asks when offended, "Don't you think the customer is always right?"). She will use the proposition in her job related reasoning ("Since arguing with this customer would be against the proposition that the customer is always right, I will not argue with him."), and so on. Outside of such contexts (or when she herself is a customer!) we would expect her to have no such tendencies. This leads into my idea of "scopes."

Individually and Grouply Held Propositional Attitudes

I want to distinguish between three different scopes for each of my propositional attitudes: *unrestricted*, *individual*, and *group*. In the former, propositional tendencies exist with no restrictions to any particular kinds of contexts in which the person is found. *Individual*, and *group* represent two kinds of propositional tendencies having restricted scope. Roughly

speaking, when a belief, for example, has an *individual* scope a person has a tendency to have that belief only in contexts in which the individual is not, or at least not primarily, thinking of him or her self as part of a group. The person then holds the belief "individually," marking the *mode* in which the person has the belief (and not the fact that no relevant other person has the same belief).¹⁴ In a *group* scope a person has the tendency to have the belief only in contexts wherein he or she is thinking of herself as a member of a relevant group. The person then holds the belief *grouply*, that is in a "grouply way."¹⁵ The same scope distinction holds for acceptance and treating as true.

To illustrate, consider the following episode from an ethnographic study of the Tully River Tribe of Australia made by the ethnographer, W. Roth, in 1900.¹⁶ Roth reported that Tully River natives believed that a woman becomes pregnant by touching a certain kind of frog, by having certain dreams, or by eating a certain kind of beans. Roth concluded that the Tully River folk had no knowledge of the true biological cause of conception by heterosexual relations.

This gave rise to the "Tully River Controversy" in anthropology, mainly between the American anthropologist, Milford Spiro and the British anthropologist, Edmund Leach. Spiro supported Roth's conclusion.¹⁷ According to Leach, however, it was wildly implausible to think that these natives had not hit upon the biological cause of conception. Thus, Leach insists that the tribe-members knew that heterosexual relations caused pregnancy. Leach maintains that "When an ethnographer reports that 'members of the X tribe believe that . . . ' he is giving a description of . . . something which is true of the culture as a whole."¹⁸ This means that the members of the tribe made their magical claims *qua* members of their culture, while holding different individual beliefs.

Suppose Leach is correct about the Tully River split between grouply and individually held positions on magical conception. This could be a case of *grouply acceptance*, formed in an *involuntary* way through a long process of acculturation of the tribes' members. The natives would have acquired acceptance-dispositions for magical conception when and only when they found themselves thinking grouply. An additional possibility is, however, that Tully River natives *believed* grouply that a woman conceived in a magical way. In their long process of acculturation, they could have acquired a disposition for an appropriate belief-feeling and belief-behavior regarding magical conception when thinking grouply. In group contexts, these people would have a tendency to enter a state of mind in which they actually *felt* it to be true that magical pregnancy was true. The feeling could have all the Humean "vividness" and "liveliness" that characterizes belief in general. If so, this would be a case of grouply *belief*. It seems to me that grouply belief exists, and so I recognize it as a category along with group treating as true and group acceptance.

My distinction between individually and grouply owes much to Margaret Gilbert's distinction between what she calls "individual" and "collective" belief.¹⁹ But there is an important difference. For Gilbert, the belief of a person is a *collective* one only when that person is acting in the capacity of a group member or speaking in the name of the group. Gilbert asks us to consider the following kind of example: In a committee meeting, opinions

differed as to whether a new appropriation was required for higher education. By majority vote, the committee decided in favor of the appropriation. After the meeting, the committee spokesperson announces to the press that "the committee believes" that a new appropriation is required for higher education. Consider a member of the committee who voted against this decision. Personally, he believes that a new appropriation is *not* needed. Nonetheless, *as a member of the committee* he is prepared to advance the decision and work for the new legislation. He shares a "collective belief," says Gilbert, that a new appropriation is required.

Here is how Gilbert contrasts individual and collective belief:

In the [individual] case, an individual is guided by the proposition in question, in his personal reasoning and action. In the [group] case, individuals in the role of group members are guided by it as they act within the group and as members of the group.²⁰

And:

When an individual believes that *p*, he grants the proposition that *p* the status of an assumption in his own private reasoning. When people [as a group] jointly accept that *p*, they commit themselves to granting *p* the status of an assumption in their public reasoning, their discussions, arguments, and conversations with the relevant others in the contexts at issue.²¹

Now, my category of "grouply" differs from Gilbert's "collective" in the following way: I propose to widen the relevant contexts of collective propositional attitudes to include not only when a person is in a group relevant context, as in public behavior, as Gilbert does, but also when a person is simply envisioning himself *as* a member of the group. This can be in the privacy of one's own home as much as at a press conference representing a group or in actual group interaction. In addition, I distinguish between an unrestricted and an individual scope for the propositional attitudes under discussion.

More carefully, I offer these definitions:

- (a) *S* has an *individual* propositional attitude to *p* with regard to a group *G*, when the scope of *S*'s attitude to *p* is restricted to contexts lacking *G*-group-significance for *S*.
- (b) *S* has a *grouply* propositional attitude to *p* with regard to a group *G*, when the scope of *S*'s attitude to *p* is restricted to contexts having *G*-group-significance for *S*.

and

- (c) *S* has an *unrestricted* propositional attitude to *p* with regard to a group *G* when *S*'s attitude to *p* is not restricted in scope, that is, when, *S* has the propositional attitude *simpliciter*.

For example, grouply belief would look like this:

S believes grouply that *p* relevant to *G*:

- (1) If *S*, in contexts with G-group-significance for *S*, considers whether *p* is the case, *S* will in those contexts tend to feel it to be the case that *p*.
- (2) In contexts with G-group-significance for *S*, if someone asks *S* whether *p*, *S* will in those contexts have a tendency to respond in the affirmative.
- (3) In contexts with G-group-significance for *S*, *S* will tend to use *p* as a premise in theoretical and practical reasoning where this is appropriate.
- (4) In contexts with G-group-significance for *S*, *S* will tend to act in ways that would be appropriate if it were the case that *p*, given *S*'s goals, aversions, and other propositional attitudes.
- (5) *S* has a tendency, when acting in ways cited by (1)–(4), to act in a way that displays *S*'s feeling that *p*.

The intersection of my two groups of categories yields nine epistemic categories:

Belief: unrestrictedly, individually, and grouply

Acceptance: unrestrictedly, individually, and grouply

Treating as true: unrestrictedly, individually, and grouply

I assume the possibility of propositional attitudes being cut off from each other by exclusive scopes, or of overlapping dispositional sets possibly at odds with one another, with one set playing a dominant role in the overlap. Thus an individual belief might be at odds with a grouply acceptance, and so on.

Some may object to the possibility of "belief" or acceptance being restricted in scope in these ways.²² The grounds for the objection would be that something couldn't properly be called "belief" or "acceptance" unless it characterized a person's propositional attitude as a whole, as it were. Suppose, the objection goes, that in answer to the same query, a person would give consecutively contradictory replies. Providing that she understood the question properly, we should conclude that she was irrational, confused or perhaps even mentally ill. To be said to have a belief or an acceptance a person must display a constancy and rationality of the relevant dispositions. In the same way, in the kinds of cases I am citing, rather than say that a person had differing individual and grouply "beliefs" we ought to say instead that she had no beliefs about the matter. She must be either confused or terribly ambivalent about the matter at hand.

Now, even were I to agree that in ordinary language a restricted-scope attitude could not properly be called "belief," that would not damage my present project. I have introduced restricted-scope belief as shorthand for a list of restricted-scope dispositions. The above objection gives no reason to doubt that the described dispositions cannot take effect with restricted scopes. If this goes against ordinary language, then let me declare that a "restricted scope belief" is not a "belief" as we ordinarily understand. I could use the term "proto-belief" or some other term instead. The objector, therefore, may read "proto-belief" wherever I have written "belief" for restricted scopes.

Nonetheless, I am not convinced that my usage does violate our ordinary idea of belief. When we say a person who answers the same question inconsistently is confused or cannot make up his mind, we may do so only because we do not envision *in those circumstances* a split set of restricted-scope beliefs. After all, it is hard to imagine there being, say, one set of dispositions for answering question, Q, the first time, another set for answering Q a second time, in the same setting. However, given what we know about human behavior and of how the brain works it is not difficult to suppose there exists in one human brain one set of dispositions for grouply contexts and another for individual ones.

Furthermore, the inclination to suppose "belief" could not have restricted scope may follow not from a conceptual fact about belief, but from our desire to categorize people not only as believ-*ing* p but also believ-*ers* of p. In many cases, we have good practical reasons for wanting to do so. This interest, rather than conceptual constraints, might be driving our dissatisfaction when asked to recognize a person with split-scoped attitudes as having a diversity of *beliefs*. My scheme, on the other hand, invites recognizing that at times there may be no further story to be told beyond describing the sets of dispositions a person has toward p in respectively different kinds of contexts. A person need not always be a "believer" *simpliciter*, but sometimes a repository of a gamut of scoped feeling-behavior dispositions.

Okay. Suppose we agree that scoped beliefs, or proto-beliefs, exist. Do not conflicts between at least some scoped dispositions indicate serious cognitive malfunction or self-deception? How can a person, for example, rationally believe grouply that p while individually doubting p? My answer is that the very *having* of disparate propositional attitudes across scopes no more indicates cognitive malfunction or self-deception than do other cognitive clashes in one's noetic makeup. We should all be familiar with having conflicting beliefs, at least until we come to realize the conflict. (Once I firmly believed, separately, of course, that on a certain Monday evening I would be in quite two different places the entire evening. Only on the morning of that Monday did the two paths converge into cognitive dissonance.) We are often pulled in different directions by conflicting evidence and desires. We may or may not be aware of the conflict. Our cognitive lives, group and individual, are too complicated and too rich to expect no such conflicts, even serious ones, to occur. Just *having* scoped conflicts is no sin.

Cognitive malfunction or self-deception could arise depending upon what one does when aware of scope conflicts, when one realizes, say, that one believes p grouply but doubts it individually, that is, discovers herself with the disparate sets of dispositions. In an array of possible cases, maintaining the conflicting attitudes would involve neither cognitive malfunction nor self-deception. For example, suppose I just "find myself" believing (or proto-believing) p grouply and also find myself with some doubts about p individually.²³ Suppose further that I want to believe p unrestrictedly, with universal scope, but find myself with serious doubts when in non-group contexts. In the meantime, I retain my grouply belief and hope that as time goes by my individual belief will change. This can be eminently rational. Or suppose I accept p individually but find myself

disbelieving p grouply. I might decide to quit that group and cultivate cognitive uniformity with my individual acceptance. Or I might decide to stay with the group and retain my grouply dispositions because I believe it is far more worthy to do so than to leave. For example, I might value the wonderful work the group does and find my grouply attitude indispensable for my acting with them. Neither decision need imply cognitive malfunction or self-deception.

Creedal Confession

As I noted at the start, my point of departure in discussing creedal affirmation will be Aquinas, who recorded a rather common-sense view of the practice. Aquinas thought "belief" was an "inner act of faith," and confession of a creed an "outward" act of faith. Aquinas writes, "The outward utterance is intended to signify the inward thought,"²⁴ and it is clear from the context that Aquinas thought this intention was carried out. Creedal affirmations, therefore, are outwardly *expressive* of what exists inwardly.

What is the "inward act of faith?"²⁵ For Aquinas, a person can be moved to assent to a proposition either by the intellect or by the will. Sometimes, an object of the intellect will move the will to assent when that object is not sufficient to move the intellect to assent. Now, the propositions of faith, for Aquinas, do not move the intellect in this life, because a person cannot have a sufficient grasp of them. When the propositions of faith, however, draw the will to assent by virtue of the supreme good presented in these propositions, a person acquires what Aquinas calls "formed faith." If the will is drawn for other reasons, we get just plain faith. Finally, for Aquinas, the certainty of faith is less than for some other propositions a person holds when moved by the intellect.

Aquinas's account of faith includes several features of what I have called acceptance. Although scholars differ over to what extent, if any, faith is voluntary for Aquinas, he can be read as thinking of faith as a voluntary act of a person. In that case, faith is like acceptance, and not belief, in allowing its voluntary formation. We have seen also that acceptance can arise when a person is not sufficiently moved by the evidence to believe a proposition, but sufficiently moved to adopt it as his position. We could say then, with Aquinas, that in voluntary acceptance a faith-proposition moves the will and not the intellect. Finally, acceptance typically will result in a less certain stance than outright belief. All told, then, Aquinas's faith would best be assimilated to what I have been calling acceptance.

For Aquinas, faith seems to be a propositional attitude of unrestricted scope. This follows from his description of faith as pertaining to a person being moved by a proposition, without reference to any context. A faith-proposition moves a person's will *per se*. To summarize, then, creedal affirmation for Aquinas seems to be an outward expression of an acceptance of unrestricted scope.

I propose three amendments to Aquinas's view of the practice of creedal confession. First, unlike Aquinas, we should include in the expressive function not only acceptance (if acceptance be what Aquinas recognizes) but also belief and treating as true. Secondly, creedal confession can express propositional attitudes of restricted-scope. Thirdly, while recognizing its

expressive function, I want to point to a central non-expressive function of creedal confession not supervenient upon its expressive uses, namely that of creating an *impression* that confessors possess an *unrestricted* attitude, indeed belief, to the confessional doctrines.

With regard to my first amendment, to include belief in creedal confession would require a theology different from Aquinas,⁷ but people do have other thoughts about our concept of God than his. And at least some of these would allow us to say that a person believed the creed and not only accepted it. I want to go further, though, to include under serious confession some instances of *treating as true* religious doctrines without belief or acceptance. This would include, especially, Pascalian-type circumstances in which a woman treats a dogma as true in an effort to influence her psychology so as to acquire a belief in it. She sincerely *wants* to believe, and so, following Pascal's advice, she "takes the holy water," she "has masses said," and participates in creedal confessions.

As to my second amendment, to include restricted scope attitudes in serious confessions, I begin by asking you to consider the following two sentences in ordinary language:

(CB1) Catholics believe the sun rises in the morning.

And

(CB2) Catholics believe that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son together.

(CB1) is equivalent to:

(CB1a) (x)(If x is a Catholic, then x believes-with-unrestricted-scope that the sun rises in the morning.)

However, (CB2), if true, is not equivalent to:

(CB2a) (x)(If x is a Catholic, then x believes-with-unrestricted-scope that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son together.)

It is not equivalent, because, besides the issue of belief, we should recognize that for some Catholics the belief in the doctrine of double procession might have only limited scope. (Neither should (CB2) be taken, with belief-with-unrestricted-scope, as a so-called "generic proposition" such as "Cats climb trees," meant to describe what is typically the case for a class of objects. It is an open question to what extent Catholics typically believe this doctrine with unrestricted scope.)

A religious group is not simply a collection of people whose religious propositional attitudes happen to coincide, the collectivity being the sum total of individual beliefs. The strong group-character of religion points to the importance of grouply held propositional attitudes among the members of a religion. So the possibility exists that a Catholic will have a grouply belief in a dogma, with no corresponding individual belief. Personally, when she thinks about it and is allowing herself not to think *as a Catholic*, momentarily standing outside "the circle of faith," she may find herself, perhaps without admitting it, without any real opinion on the matter. This should be expected especially for dogmas like that of double procession, which do not figure much in the daily life of a religious adherent.

A person typically acquires and sustains religious "belief" as a member of a religious group and may hold a position *only as* a member of the group. One hears things like "*We Muslims believe in . . .*" or "*As a Jew I believe that . . .*" Some Catholics' positive propositional attitude towards the doctrine of "Filioque" or "double procession," would sometimes likely be restricted to dispositions, involuntarily acquired, in contexts having group-significance for them. When not thinking of themselves *as* Catholics, they might have no set of tendencies in favor of the doctrine.

Our conception of religious faith, therefore, should take account of religious devotees who hold at least some of their propositional attitudes only *qua* members of a doctrinal community. We should even entertain the possibility that for some doctrines, like those not so relevant to their daily lives, some or many (all?) adherents have only a grouply-attitude toward them.

So I am inclined to understand (CB2), if true, as saying that Catholics believe, accept, or treat as true the doctrine of double procession and hold these attitudes in either a restricted or unrestricted way. More formally:

(CB2a) (x)(If x is a Catholic, then x believes, accepts, or treats as true in a restricted or unrestricted way that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son together.)

Generalizing now, what it means for a person to affirm a creed should include: (1) unrestricted belief and acceptance,²⁶ (2) grouply belief and acceptance, when on the individual-level the dispositions are simply absent or accompanied by a level of doubt, and (3) some instances of treating as true.

Now for my third amendment. Expressing an actual (or hoped for) propositional attitude is but one aim of creedal confession. Another purpose, non-expressive all the way down, less likely to be explicitly acknowledged, is creating the *impression*, among and for religious adherents, that religious devotees *believe* the doctrines, in my technical sense, rather than accept them, and that their belief has unrestricted scope, rather than merely grouply-scope.

How does creedal confession accomplish this purpose? The impression that all adherents hold a belief is not necessarily implied by the semantic content of creedal formulations. A creed formulated in terms of "belief" can refer either to "belief" or "acceptance" in my technical sense. Also, while many creeds are formulated in terms of belief, such as the Nicene Creed of Christianity and the semi-creedal *Ani Ma'amin* of Judaism, others are not, including the Islamic *shahada*, the Christian Athanasian and Westminster creeds, and the semi-creedal Jewish *Yigdal* recitation.²⁷ In addition, nothing within the content of creeds distinguishes *unrestricted* from *grouply* held propositional attitudes. The desired impression of universal-unrestricted-belief is created, rather, by pragmatic, rather than semantic, implications. Here is how it works.

The confessional context creates an atmosphere apt for activating grouply tendencies in a devotee. A person is put into an atmosphere in which she thinks of herself *as* a member of the doctrinal community. The first step in creating the wanted impression, therefore, is to elicit sincere affirmations of the creed even from those who believe or accept the creed only grouply.

Next, there is a pragmatic implication to belief, in my technical sense, rather than acceptance, in the following way. Ordinarily, when one simply states *p*, there is no ready pragmatic implication to belief rather than to acceptance. However, if one regularly declares *p* with marked seriousness a hearer will be entitled to infer that the speaker has a feeling of conviction about *p*, and does not just accept it. One of the ways to get others to *think* you really believe *p* is to state it to them often enough, in relevant circumstances. (This has to be done carefully, however, so as not to appear to "protest too much" and produce the opposite effect.) Such circumstances include especially where conviction is a *desiratum*. Creedal confession is just such a circumstance. Even if mere acceptance be religiously satisfactory, devotion of "all of one's heart and all of one's soul," not just acceptance, is what religions long for in a devotee. So even if *belief* is not mandated, still conviction-belief is supposed to be valued above all else. We should see creedal declarations, therefore, as *ritualized acts* for creating the pragmatic implication that a religion's adherents are universally convinced of the truth of the creed, believing it and not merely accepting it. Creedal affirmation serves the non-expressive function of creating the impression of universal belief by confessors.

The pragmatic implication to *unrestricted* belief rather than *grouply* belief exists most clearly for creeds formulated as first person belief declarations of, "I believe." This includes, for example, the semi-creedal Jewish *ani ma'amin*, which begins with the words, "I believe in perfect faith," as well as the Nicene Creed that begins with the words, "I believe in one God, the Father Almighty." In contrast, recall the committee member with only a grouply attitude toward the committee's call for increased allocations to higher education. Individually, he opposed it or abstained. Such a person need not, and ordinarily would not, proclaim, "I believe the allocation should be increased." He will simply support an increase in the allocation, and refer to the *committee's* "belief" to that effect. Also, a Tully River native, with a grouply attitude toward magical pregnancy, did not state that *he* or *she* believed in magical conception. They simply asserted magical conception to be a fact. When dealing with first-person belief formulations of a creed, a pragmatic implication is that the devotee wishes to draw attention to his or her holding the doctrine in an *unrestricted* way, that she or he is not holding it just grouply.

The pragmatic implication to an unrestricted propositional attitude applies, though with somewhat less force, to creedal affirmations not formulated as first-person belief, such as the Jewish *yigdal* prayer. The implication would be created by the repeated proclamation of the creed. The implication is yet weaker, however, for creeds formulated in first person plural, such as the Chalcedonian creed opening with, "Following, then, the holy fathers, we unite in teaching all men to confess the one and only Son, our Lord Jesus Christ."

There is a paradoxical air about the whole affair of pragmatically implying unrestricted-belief in creedal doctrines. Since the confessors of the creed know it to be a *ritualized*, indeed mandated affair, the pragmatic implication takes place within a consciousness that the confession may be "staged," precisely for the purpose of creating an impression that might very well be false. Although employed for a good and noble purpose,

creedal confession, therefore, may involve institutional bad faith or self-deception, and invites analysis similar to those offered for the paradox of individual self-deception.²⁸

To conclude, my proposal is that the ritualized performance of creedal confession creates an atmosphere for thinking that all adherents believe, and unrestrictedly so, in the creed. And I may add, the expressivist view itself might be a further part of that very strategy. By taking an expressivist position on creedal confession one might want, consciously or not, to contribute further to the impression that when confessing, people mean exactly what they seem to be saying.

Advanced religions, at their best, teach that the individual human condition is in need of radical transformation and offer life-embracing programs for fostering their respective visions of that transformation. These programs employ various strategies for strengthening the faith for this end and for other purposes. One of these educational strategies is the creation of group impressions, true or false, as in creedal confessions.²⁹

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NOTES

1. Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* 2:2, q3, A2. Translated by Fathers of the English Dominican Province (Westminster, MD: Christian Classics, 1946 and 1947) Volume Three, 1182.

2. Ibid.

3. *Summa Theologica* 2:2, q3, A2, p. 1183.

4. This part of my paper owes much to William Alston, "Belief, Acceptance and Religious Faith," in *Faith, Freedom, and Rationality* ed. Jeff Jordan and Daniel Howard-Snyder (Lanham and London: Rowman and Littlefield, 1996)

5. See William Alston, "Belief, Acceptance and Religious Faith"; L. Jonathan Cohen, *An Essay on Belief and Acceptance* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, (1992); Robert Stalnaker, *Inquiry* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1984); Bas Van Fraassen, *The Scientific Image* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980), and Edna Ullman-Margalit and Avishai Margalit, "Holding True and Holding as True," *Synthese* 92, 1992, pp. 167–87.

6. For the sake of simplicity, I will be ignoring the distinction, treated by Ullman-Margalit and Margalit between an attitude toward a proposition and toward a sentence. I will pretend that the attitudes are all toward a proposition.

7. Charles Saunders Pierce, "The Fixation of Belief," *Philosophical Writings of Pierce* selected with an introduction by Julius Buchler (New York: Dover, 1955).

8. Pierce, "The Fixation of Belief"

9. This follows William P. Alston, in his "Belief, Acceptance and Religious Faith."

10. Alston has: "S will tend to act in ways that would be appropriate if it were the case that p, given S's goals, aversions, and S's other beliefs." However, we should take into account not only S's other beliefs but S's other epistemic attitudes, such as acceptance and treating as true.

11. Alston does not have this clause.

12. For a recent discussion of this issue see Jerome Gellman, Review of Jonathan Adler, *Beliefs Own Ethics*, "Iyun, Israeli Journal of Philosophy, 2003.

13. The example is from Ullman-Margalit and Avishai Margalit.

14. That a person holds a belief in an individual way does not entail that no social forces act on the person to have that belief. The point of introducing this category is that when a person thinks of herself other than as a member of a particular group, in some cases this might weaken the social forces, then enabling the person to have a different belief than what she has when thinking of herself as a member of the group.

15. There are complications here. That S holds a belief grouply does not entail that anyone other than S holds that belief grouply. S, after all, might be mistaken about what the group thinks! I omit such complications from my discussion.

16. W. E. Roth, "Scientific Report (to the Under-Secretary, Brisbane) on the Natives of the (lower) Tully River," Cooktown, 1900.

17. Melford E. Spiro, "Virgin Birth, Parthenogenesis and Physiological Paternity: An Essay in Cultural Interpretation" *Man*, 3, 1968, pp. 242–61.

18. Edmund Leach, "Virgin Birth," in Leach, *Genesis as Myth and Other Essays* (London, J. Cape, 1969), p. 88.

19. Margaret Gilbert, *On Social Facts* (London and New York: Routledge, 1989) and "Modelling Collective Belief," *Synthese*, 1987 (73) pp. 185–204.

20. Gilbert, *On Social Facts*, p. 313.

21. *Ibid.*, p. 309. Since Gilbert's examples do not ascribe a disposition for a belief–feeling, they would not qualify as *belief*, in my sense. Specifically, the committee member's propositional attitude might best be considered "treating as true" for group contexts. Gilbert discusses belief and acceptance in "Belief and Acceptance as Features of Groups," in *Proto Sociology, An International Journal of Interdisciplinary Research*, 16, 2002, pp. 70–86. For a discussion of the distinction between belief and acceptance in connection with Gilbert, see K. Brad Way, "Collective Belief and Acceptance," *Synthese* 29, 2001, pp. 319–33.

22. Eliezer Malkiel raised this objection in conversation.

23. For my examples, remember that belief (and lack of it), individual and grouply, is involuntary.

24. Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* 2:2, q3, A2, p. 1182.

25. I am indebted to Eleonore Stump for my understanding of Aquinas on faith.

26. Alston anticipates this clause in his "Belief, Acceptance and Religious Faith."

27. Both the *Ani Ma'amin* and the *Yigdal* recitations are based on Maimonides' so-called "13 Principles of Faith," appearing in Maimonides' commentary to the Mishnah. However, it is generally accepted that these principle never reached the status of official dogmas for Judaism. See, Menachem Kellner, *Must a Jew Believe Anything?* (Oxford: Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 1999).

28. For a classical discussion of the paradoxes of self-deception see Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness* (New York: Washington Square Press, 1966), Part One, Chapter Two.

29. I am indebted to many people for their comments and criticism. These include Dalia Deri, Charlotte Katsoff, Yakir Levine, Amira Liber, Yuval Lurie, Eliezer Malkiel, Isaac Nevo, and Josef Stern.